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## Interview with Michael Markwith

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# Interview with Michael Markwith

CEO, Swets & Zeitlinger, Inc., US

by Katina Strauch (College of Charleston)

*Mike Markwith is an upbeat kind of guy. On a bright, sunny morning two days after he had started work in his new position, we talked to him about his new responsibilities. Effective May 1, Mike became Chief Executive Officer for Swets & Zeitlinger, Inc US. Headquartered in Lisse, Netherlands, Swets is an established company which has offices in UK, Germany, Sweden, Italy, Brazil, Japan, France, and Korea and has been doing business in the US for about 50 years. This is a new position for Swets as they become more involved in the US. —KS*

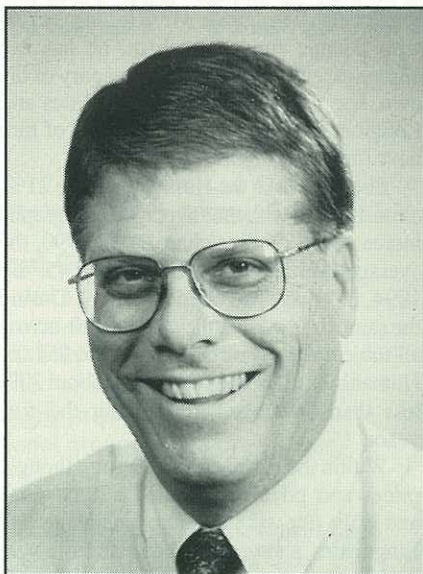
ATG: So Mike — congratulations. Tell us about your new job.

MM: Well, Katina, it is very exciting! Swets is the largest subscription agency in Europe and has always had a solid customer base in the U.S. My responsibilities are to help us grow in the US market. Over the past 10 years I have competed with Swets and gained a great respect for the company from the loyal customers. Swets has generally dealt with large academic and medical research libraries, specializing in European publications. We have been chosen by some research libraries for more than European titles and are planning to build on that positive reputation. And while Swets is primarily a subscription agent we also have a publishing division in Lisse as well as complementary serials services incorporating library automation and serials control systems (SAILS), Table of Contents awareness (Swetscan), Backsets, and a consolidation and shipping service of journals to libraries worldwide. This service might be best described as "outsourcing" in the current vernacular.

ATG: Who is your boss?

MM: I report to **Cees Schuurman**, Chairman of the Executive Board, and also work closely with **Albert Prior** to develop marketing initiatives for the US. As you know, Swets is a family-owned and, thus, privately held company.

ATG: Swets has opened a new office in Exton, Pa. Didn't they always have a US office? I know that the fabulous **Peter Nijsten** is in charge of all customer service for North



America. How many people will be working for you?

MM: Yes, the office has been in the Philly area for over 20 years, and just relocated to Exton about 15 months ago. It's a great location near fields and open spaces. **Marie Gillies**, the General Manager (and former **Charleston Conference** participant and speaker I might add!) has been with the company eighteen years and is a valuable asset to our business. Last January Swets announced that we will move our North American customer service operation to the United States and the fabulous Peter (along with two of his fabulous colleagues in Lisse, **Antoon van Velzen** and **Willem-Jan Hoojmans**) will be moving to Exton this August. Peter will remain the manager for all North American Customer Service and I look forward to working with him. Peter, Marie and 32 other employees make up the staff in the US at this time. Also, **Ariane Swets** has been in sales in the US for almost two years and will continue in this role. It is a vital team for me to join and work with. We expect to have a good time. What I have found to be most interesting so far is that with a central database all our customer service folks can provide help from any office location. I like to think of Swets as offering the traditional European service locally from the US.

ATG: Do you have any regrets about

leaving **Faxon/Dawson**? You have seen them through some hard times.

MM: I really enjoyed working with the people of **Faxon** both personally and professionally. They are dedicated people!! I was approached by a recruiter about this position out of the blue and I felt it was too good an opportunity to pass up. I have worked in this business for 28 years and am really honored to have been chosen by **Swets** for this job.

ATG: What will you do first?

MM: I am spending this week learning a new e-mail system, a new business vocabulary, and (of course) a different corporate culture. I'm also learning a new business system and was really excited to find that Swets has access to checkin data for over 40,000 titles which is a service that US librarians have always liked. So it's been an exciting first two days to say the least. Obviously, I am also meeting many staff in Exton for the first time and have been very impressed. The next two weeks I'll be in Lisse. I did fly over for a weekend to interview so this is my first extended stay. Actually, I understand that I'll be expected to come over a number of times a year and that's pretty nifty.

I'm told I don't have to learn Dutch because the English is impeccable in Holland, but my plans are to study the language anyway and have some fun with a new language.

ATG: Can you give us a thumbnail sketch of what your work career has been?

MM: Sure . . . I've been quite lucky actually. I was in school at Graduate Theological Union and needing a part time job was hired by **Aaron Saady** of the Sausalito office of **Richard Abel & Co**. I worked afternoons doing approval returns and firm order fulfillment for \$1.50/hr. It was 1967 after all. Then we moved back to Oregon and **Dick Abel** suggested the Management Trainee program. The work became full time and my career began. This is when I met **Lyman Newlin**, the Magnificent. I was put in charge of the Advanced Information Division, identifying and ordering for the Approval Plan. Lyman was the publisher rela-

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strict the content of what is being shared. Perhaps we are already there. At that point, we will have no choice but to defer to individual responsibility and parental control. As a parent, I appreciate the fact that America Online allows me to block certain types of content and interaction for the account which my children use. I also appreciate the fact that I can maintain an account on AOL under which I can have full access to the AOL rooms, including some in which the discussions get heated and the language can get rough. If AOL did not provide the blocking capability, I probably would not allow my children to use the service. If AOL did not contain grown-up rooms with grown-up interaction, I personally would not enjoy the service as much. But those are my choices to make. And it is AOL's choice to design their service in such a way as to appeal to people like me. Neither one of us


needed government intervention to make those choices.

Attempts to control cyberspace, because



of its nature, will almost by definition have to be onerous in order to be successful, and even then such attempts probably would not

succeed. There seemingly are no delicate ways for the government to intervene in cyberspace. We saw that with the failed Clipper Chip initiative, in which the government sought to have the key to all encrypted communications. We saw that in the Thomas AA-BBS case, in which the long arm of federal law hauled the California couple to Tennessee for prosecution, simply because that is where the user who downloaded the material was located. We see it again with S.314, which, even with the insertion of the new defenses, seeks to impose restrictions on the content of all telecommunications, however consensual, at every step along the way.

One can conclude from these efforts that it will be difficult for the government to protect us from ourselves in cyberspace without impinging on individual responsibilities. 

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tions man and my mentor. I had 2 kids in diapers. Then Dick moved me from Oregon to New Jersey and into Approval Plan sales. This combined background led me to the position of head of library acquisitions at SUNY Binghamton when it appeared that the Abel Company was in some trouble. (The kids were still in diapers . . . now they've both graduated from college.) I've always felt this was a great way to round out my business perspective by working first hand in a library.

I left SUNY and ended up eventually at Blackwell North America after Blackwells bought Abel. I worked at Blackwells from 1977 to 1987, when my dear friend, Becky Lenzini, got me involved in the serials business. She recruited me to work for Faxon and was my boss until she left to create CARL UnCover. I left Faxon for a brief time to be VP Sales at Yankee Book Peddler but returned to Faxon after 6 months for a senior management position with national and finally international responsibilities. And, now, this . . .

ATG: Mike, you are so active in the profession. You spoke at the first Charleston Conference 15 years ago. You are on the Conference Planning Committee for the upcoming NASIG meeting at Duke. What all else are you involved in?

MM: Well I really like the profession and all the trappings . . . the people, the

conferences, the work. I have only missed two Charleston Conferences and remember the first one way back in that dormitory commons room behind the library with 25 attendees. What a difference now, Katina!


I was truly honored to be asked to serve on the UNC-Chapel Hill School of Information and Library Science's Board of Visitors. It is exciting to see where library education is heading and to meet and work with highly motivated library school students, a wonderful dean in Barbara Moran, and the other wonderful Board members. I have been active in ALA Committee work as well as local Virginia activities like the Friends of the Library Booksale at Richmond Public Library. All very rewarding.

ATG: And let's not forget about all your extra-curricular activities. I'll bet you are glad the baseball strike is over.

MM: For sure. In Exton, I'll be an hour and a half closer to Camden Yards (Orioles ballpark) than in Richmond. It's a true win/win situation. This area has the Braves on the cable and the Orioles close by. I also learned a lot about myself by running five marathons in the past 8 years and am basically pleased to have begun and finished all five. I hope to do one more and then retire. And, as you know, I've been playing golf for over 40 years (getting worse and enjoying it more each year). Actually, I was pleased to read about Dan Tonkery's pas-

sion for golf in his ATG interview last issue [April 95]. Now we can meet on the golf course . . . and maybe I can win one for a change.

ATG: Well, Mike, we wish you lots of luck and look forward to talking more with you once you have been in the saddle at Swets for a little while. Also, we are looking forward to seeing and hearing you speak at the next (Fifteenth) Charleston Conference.

MM: I promise to start immediately preparing the presentation for the Conference on "Vendor Vision" about perspectives on the current serials environment now and for the immediate future. We surely do live and work in a time of fascinating change. It does keep us all energized to say the least. Thanks, again, for taking the time for this interview. 

Mike Markwith is a voracious reader. He says he read *Lust for Life* as preparation for his first trip to Amsterdam in April. Meanwhile he has read the new Anne Tyler and the new Ellen Gilchrist in the past week. Besides the 1995 Charleston Conference, we can see him in Chicago at ALA. In the meantime, if you want to reach him, try — <mmarkwith@swets.nl> or by phone at 800-44-SWETS. His address is: Swets Subscription Service, 440 Creamery Way, Ste. A, Exton, PA 19341. — KS